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ABSTRACT

Given the number of Canadian children under the age of 12 and the number of licensed child care spaces available, Canada may need more than 200,000 early childhood educators to meet current potential child care needs. The number of community colleges in the country providing early childhood education training is insufficient to meet this need. An ideal national early childhood education training system would provide high quality, comprehensive, transferable, mobile, up-to-date, specialized, accredited, affordable, and futuristic training. The current system includes one- and two-year programs at 111 community colleges, two- and four-year programs at 23 universities, several federally sponsored short-term programs, and private entrepreneurs offering early childhood training programs of various lengths through correspondence and career training schools. Four provinces have professional certification programs in place, and, in four others, certification is pending. This system has severe limitations, including insufficient licensed care, insufficient certified early childhood educators, insufficient training programs, little training opportunities outside of large urban areas, and no recognized standard of high quality training. Present training is often narrow and limited, and resources are outdated and overused. Improving the situation will require wide-scale support of the national child care council and heightened awareness nationwide of the importance of the issue. (WJT)

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

FOR

EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING: FUTURE NEEDS

TC 900 319

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A workshop presented by Ken Pierce and Alice Taylor at the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, May 28, 1990.

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INTRODUCTION:

In Canada today, there are approximately 2,170,219 children under the age of twelve years old. This is the potential source for child care services. At the same time, there is reported to be 298,085 licensed child care spaces in this country. If we assume, for the purposes of this discussion, that on the average every trained early childhood educator can provide futuring care to eight children, regardless of their age, then assuming that every individual working in early childhood education in licensed care has the equilvant of certified training, we probably have in the vicinity of 37,602 early childhood educators in this country. If we take this same number, i.e. one person to eight children, and apply it to number of children under 12 in Canada, we discover that we need an additional 233,675 early childhood educators to meet the current potential child care needs of Canadians.

Now some will argue that these figures are exaggerated and are based on the assumption that every parent wants licensed child care. This is a valid criticism. However, it does enable us to develop some appreciation for the magnitude of the problem that faces us now and in the future. It also allows us to develop some kind of picture of what we need for the future in early childhood education training.

If we consider the number of community colleges in this country and take into consideration the number who are now providing early childhood education training we can develop another perspective on the degree of

need or continued growth in this field. The intent of this workshop is to offer a perspective of what early childhood education should be in the future in Canada.

We propose to look briefly at what an ideal "national early childhood education training system" would look like. We then propose to consider what we are presently doing to move in the direction of building that system. Then we will consider whether or not our present apporaches are working, culminating in some suggestions as to what else we might do. We then will be asking our panel members to respond with their perspectives in these areas.

WHAT DO WE WANT?

Between us, my colleague and I - Alice Taylor - have almost forty years of experience working in the field of early childhood education. During that time, we have developed fairly comprehensive pictures of what we need in early childhood education, what we need in terms of services and training and what constitutes quality in this field. Having said that, we also have some clear ideas of what we would want in terms of early childhood education training if it is to meet the needs of students, children, families and society in general. We would like to present to you some of the traits of our "ideal" early childhood education training system.

First, such a system would have to offer high **quality** training, i.e. training that ensures the student entering the field has a high level of skill development based on sound theory and supervised practice that ensures the integration of the theoretical component.

Second, such a system would need to offer **comprehensive** training, i.e. training that prepares the student for the realities and diversity of the field today.

Third, such a system would have **transferable** training, i.e. training programs that allow participants to transfer and receive credit when moving from one training institution to another.

Fourth, such a system would have **mobile** training, i.e. training that is available to anyone who wishes it regardless of where they live in our country; training that would go to where the student is - as opposed to the traditional model of bringing the student to the training.

Fifth, such a system would be **up-to-date**, i.e. training which seeks out and reflects the latest knowledge, research and techniques in early childhood education.

Sixth, such a system would offer **specialized** training, i.e. training in the various speciality areas of early childhood education including: infant care, school aged child care, rural child care, seasonal child care, and the special needs of children.

Seventh, such a system would offer **accreditated** training, i.e. training which is recognized, not only by society for the inpact it has on future generations of Canadians, but also by other related professions who are also dealing in human services.

Eighth, such a system would offer **affordable** training, i.e. training that is attainable to all who seek it, regardless of their level of income and regardless of the current financial situation of educational institutions.

Ninth, such a system would offer **futuristic** training, i.e. training that is moving toward the goal of an ideal system with professional development opportunities and diverse avenues of research and development that reflect long range plans than a short term "band-aide" approach.

SO, WE WANT A LOT! We want our cake and we want to be able to eat it too! We want the very best and we want it to be as perfect as we can make it. Let's take a moment to consider what we have now, what we have been doing over the last number of years to build a comprehensive early childhood training system in Canada.

Alice will share with you now some thought on these areas.

WHAT DO WE HAVE NOW:

We have approximately 111 community college programs offering one and two year programs in early childhood education. They are spread across the country tending to be centered in the large urban areas.

We have 23 universities who offer two and four year degree programs in early childhood education and a few who offer Master level degrees.

We have several Federal Department offering short term programs in early childhood education that last from a few weeks to several months in duration.

We have private entrepreneurs offering early childhood training of various lengths, both directly and indirectly through correspondence and through career training schools.

We have all these various institutions and agencies issuing certificates, diplomas, degrees, records of achievements, awards of recognition, certificates of completion, etc. for early childhood training.

We have 4 provinces with professional certification program in place, each with similarities yet each different from one another. In four others certification is pending.

We have traditional training programs, we have competency based training programs, we have correspondence programs, and combinations of all the above.

We have programs that are over enrolled and under funded. Programs that are struggling within institutions to gain or share of the "ever decreasing educational dollar" from bureaucracies which do not seem to recognize the special needs of Early Childhood Education training programs.

We have a society that is beginning to recognize the important role of early childhood education but which has not, as yet, allocated resources to meet the needs of its citizens.

This is a brief overview of the present system we have in this country. Does this system meet our needs? Will this system build the kind of ideal model that we want? Will this system of diverse and uncoordinated training in early childhood education move us in the direction we want to go to building a system that has the traits we mentioned earlier?

IT IS NOT VERY LIKELY. We say this because at the present time there are several characteristics of our current system that indicate its severe limitations. For example:

1. We have insufficient licensed care.
2. We have insufficient certified early childhood educators.
3. We have insufficient early childhood education training programs.
4. We have little training opportunities outside large urban areas.
5. We have no recognized standard of high quality training.

6. Present training is often narrow and limited to a few areas of early childhood education.

7. Resources are often outdated and over utilized.

8. Student costs for training continues to increase at a dramatic and alarming rate.

9. Because of mushrooming demands of our field we seem to be using the bush fire approach rather than moving forward with a planned stragety.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We know that the present system is not meeting our needs as a society. We know that things are unlikely to change unless some new iniatives are implemented immedately. There is an old saying "if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten!" So when we think about what we can do, we have to be clear in stating that our first option is always, of course, to do nothing. It is our feeling that if we continue to do nothing, or do what we have been doing, things are unlikely to improve. Given the current economics of education this certainly seems to be an attractive option.

But what else could we do to begin the process of striving to build an effective national early childhood educational training system to meet the current and future needs of Canadian families?

There are several actions which suggesdt themselves to us at this time; they are as follows:

1. Support the actions of the C.C.D.C. Federation Training Committee whose mandate is to:

   (1) facilitate communication regarding training among the child caré community, educational institutions, educators and government representatives.

   (2) develop guidelines, models and standards for quality post-secondary child care education and professional development.

   (3) encourage research in child care education.

2. We recommend that we, individually, and in groups, however they be formed, develop strategies to heighten awareness within our institutions as to the importance of this issue.

   With this thought in mind, I would like to introduce the panel and ask them to share their thoughts and perspectives as to how we can address the need for an effective national Early Childhood Education Training System.

THANK YOU

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